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KINGDOM OF THE
SERBS, CROATS AND SLOVENES:
OFFICIAL INFORMATION BUREAU
WASHINGTON

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Jugoslavia

MEMORANDUM

ON THE

DALMATIAN QUESTION.

PRESENTED TO THE PEACE CONFERENCE IN PARIS BY THE DELEGATION OF THE KINGDOM OF SERBS, CROATS AND SLOVENES.

I. - Geographical Arguments.

Dalmatia has no natural frontiers. It is not a geographical unity which has always been contained within the same boundaries, but a creation of history, having had during various epochs different frontiers. Roman Dalmatia, for instance, included Eastern Istria up to the River Arsa, all the islands of the Adriatic, all the present Dalmatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, up to the river Boyana, and Serbia, as far as the Morava.

Dalmatia with its present frontiers only dates from 1815, while in the Middle Ages she was reduced to four or five maritime towns and some islands. Dalmatia is, on the whole, only the western coast of the Balkan Peninsula, intimately bound up with it not only by its geographical, geological, orographical, and in general its morphological structure, but also by ethnic laws, by its social atmosphere, community of race and political ideal. Istria and Dalmatia, with all its islands of the Adriatic, are nothing but chains of the Dinaric Alps of which the sea has invaded

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the valleys. In a word, Istria and Dalmatia constitute the Western littoral of the Balkan Peninsula, its right lung.

The Dinaric Alps do not in any way prevent the trade of the western Balkan littoral with its hinterland, as the history of Rome and the history of the Croats and Serbs prove. There still exist today Roman roads which facilitate commerce between the Balkan continent and the sea, roads well known to Italian merchants, who make use of them to go to Bosnia to purchase cattle. Two railways connect Dalmatia with Bosnia and Herzegovina. It would have had others if Austria had not prevented their construction.

The names of places in Dalmatia prove with absolute certainty that that country belongs to the same geographic and ethnic group as the rest of Balkans, because it would be difficult to find one per cent of names of a Latin origin, even on the islands furthest removed from the Dalmatian coast. Solely, the names of the principal towns and certain of the islands were Italianized, or are of Illyrian, Greek or Latin origin.

Therefore, Dalmatia and Istria with all the isles and islets of the Eastern Adriatic, form, from every point of view, an indivisible whole, living with and from the Balkan Peninsula. Any attempt to detach the least part, the least fragment would be a veritable mutilation.

II. - Historical Arguments.

Dalmatia, by its fortunate geographical situation, has always awaked the covetous desires of conquerors. The list of all the invasions it has had to suffer during the course of centuries would be a long one. The Romans, under the pretext of punishing pirates, undertook its conquest from the end of the 3rd century before Christ.

They had to carry on long and difficult wars and could only put the country under their yoke under the command of Tiberius, in the year 12 A. D. Velleius Paterculus states that the Dalmatians rebelled more than two hundred times against the Romans. On the other hand, neither the Illyrians nor their successors the Jugoslavs ever undertook any war of conquest against Italy.

After the Jugoslavs occupied the provinces of ancient Illyria and were definitely established there, the western branch, the Croats, founded a State on the Adriatic littoral of which the centre was the region which constitutes the present day Dalmatia. Before the reign of the Serbian dynasty of the Nemanyitch, during and even after their rule, Southern Dalmatia formed part of the Serbian State. The Croatian State was constituted as a Kingdom and during the 12th century was attached to Hungary in the form of a personal union. From its foundation it struggled against the Republic of Venice, which pretended to dominate the Dalmatian coast. In the struggle which lasted eight centuries, Venice played the part of the aggressor and the Jogoslavs never did anything but defend themselves. Our people fought with tenacity for their country and their liberty. They only succumbed to the attacks of Venice when the Turks succeeded in destroying their political independence. A striking example of what this struggle for the defense of their country was may be found in the history of Zara which, although conquered seventeen times, always shook off the yoke of Venice.

The Venetian domination, which lasted as long as the Turkish domination in Serbia, was an epoch of intellectual and economic decadence for Dalmatia. While the free Ragusa was flourishing and, under the influence

of its prosperity, was able to create an admirable civilization, which caused it to be given the title of the "Jugoslav Athens" (the literature of Ragusa at this time is now the patrimony of the Serbo-Croatian literature), the remainder of Dalmatia, dominated by Venice, offered the spectacle of the greatest misery, due to the negligence of the authorities. The French, who occupied it in 1806, did not find there a single public school and not a single mile of roads. Under the French domination (1806 to 1815), when the first schools were founded and the first roads constructed, Dalmatia began to revive. But in falling, in 1815, under the domination of Austria, it was again abandoned for a century.

The national and liberal movement in Europe, due to the French Revolution, in the first half of the 19th century brought about an awakening of the nation's conscience among the Jugoslavs of Dalmatia, a conscience which had slumbered during five centuries of foreign domination. The struggle for the use of the national language in the administration and in the schools, for power in its communes and in the provincial administration (a struggle directed against the Austrian system) began in the year 1860. In this struggle the Jugoslav national idea was victorious and the Austrian Government was forced to admit the language which was spoken by nearly the entire population, both in the schools and in the administration. The Italian bureaucracy which lost, in consequence, its predominance on the Jugoslav masses, constituted the nucleus of the present Italian minority in the towns and it is this minority of 3 per cent of the population which still pretends to dominate the other 97 per cent.

Already forty years before the present world war, the Jugoslavs, by their own efforts and contrary to the intentions of the Austrian Govern-

ment, become masters of all the autonomous institutions of the province. Of the 86 municipal councils existing in Dalmatia 85 are Slav and one only, that of Zara, is Italian. And even that one would have fallen into the hands of the Slavs if the Austrian Government had permitted the adoption of universal suffrage. Of the 41 deputies of the Dalmatian Diet 6 only were Italian, all elected in the town of Zara on account of the old system of voting, while the remaining 35 were Serbo-Croats. All the deputies to the parliament of Vienna, elven in numbers, elected by universal suffrage, were Serbo-Croats. An enormous Slav majority was elected to the Dalmatian Diet and did not cease to demand the union with the sister provinces of Croatia and Slavonia with which, in the Middle Ages, it had formed a powerful state. Austria-Hungary always opposed these legitimate aspirations (and that in complete accord with the Italian political party of Dalmatia). Austria-Hungary is now dead for good and the Dalmatian people hopes that with Austria has also died the iniquitous system it represented.

III. - Ethnical, statistical and political arguments.

The strongest argument in modern politics to decide to whom a country should belong is the ethnical one. Now, it would be difficult to find a country ethnically more pure or more homogeneous than Dalmatia. The following are the statistical data:

The official census of 1910 established a percentage of 96.19% of inhabitants of the Serbo-Croat language, 2.94 per cent of the Italian language and 0.75 per cent of other nationalities, that is to say 610,669 Serbo-Croats and 18,028 Italians.

In 1851, when the political power was exclusively in the hands of the Italians, the returns gave 378,676 Slavs and 14,645 Italians. In 1857,

when the Government was still favorable to the Italians and the latter were in power in Dalmatia, the statistics gave 415,628 Slavs and 16,000 Italians. The population speaking Italian therefore always remains in a proportion of 3 to 4 per cent. That it does not increase in the same proportion as the Jugoslavs is due to the fact that it is exclusively urban, being composed of people belonging to the lower and middle class and not including any inhabitants in the country.

One part of this population is formed of immigrants from Italy and the other of Italianized natives. There does not exist in Dalmatia an autochtonous Italian population. The immigrants are descendants of the Venetian functionaries who remained in Dalmatia in the 17th and 18th centuries, or of Austrian functionaries (originally from the Lombardo-Venetian Kingdom) who established themselves in the country during the first half of the 19th century, and finally small merchants, artizans, sailors or fisherman who arrived recently from Italy and who have formed new Italian colonies similar to those in Marseilles, Tunis and the Argentine. The remainder is composed of Slavs, Italianized in the schools or adherents of the Italian political party, which quite recently still held power. Nevertheless all these Dalmatians speaking the Italian language have always declared that they were not Italians but Slavs of Italian civilization. Until the end of the 19th century, they called themselves "Slavo-Dalmatians", opposing this denomination to the national names of Croats and Serbs. Their only popular political journal was printed exclusively in the Serbo-Croatian language and bore the name of "Pravi Dalmatinac" (which means, in Serbo-Croatian, the "true Dalmatian").

The ethnical character of the town of Zara itself does not differ

in any way from the other Dalmatian towns. Zara was already Slav in the 12th century. A chronicle of the year 1177 states that the Pope Alexander III, when he came to the town, was accompanied in procession to the church of St. Anastasia while hymns in the Slav language (...illorum lingua slavonica...) were sung. (Farlati, III, 3.)

In its struggle against Venice it showed more resistance than any of its sister towns. Though its Slav population was more than once exterminated or dispersed by the Venetians, the base nevertheless remained Slav. Today Zara is a little town of functionaries, the last bulwark of an Italian bureaucracy in a purely Slav country. Having been under the Venetian and Austrian dominations the capital of the province, it is the headquarters of the greatest number of Italianized functionaries, who, with their families and their dependents, constitute the majority of the population. But this majority is limited to the urban part of Zara, to the town alone, without the suburbs or environs, for if one considers the entire community of Zara it is found that the Slavs are in a proportion of 3 to 1 Italian, and in the district of Zara this proportion is 7 to 1.

As to the Dalmatian islands the population is purely Slav and possesses highly developed national conscience. These are Slav to such a point that in the Island of Lissa, for instance (the one the furthest from the mainland), out of 10,041 one cannot even find one per cent of Italians.

The Serbo-Croatian literature had its roots principally in the islands which were rivals of Ragusa in the poetic art. The most ancient inscriptions on stone in the Serbo-Croatian language are found at Starigrad (Cittavecchia), a little town situated in the island of Hvar (Lesina). Inscriptions even in glagolite (old Slavonic) characters are found at

Suchurai on Lesina.

During a struggle which has lasted a thousand years the Dalmatians have kept the old-Slavonic language in the liturgy of the Roman Catholic church where, even at Zara, as in the times of Pope Alexander III, the Slav hymns still are sung.

Dalmatia is the purest Slav country and five centuries of foreign domination could not denationalize it; its conscience of being Slav is a more living force then in any region in the Balkans. The Dalmatian Diet, at the opening of each new session, has never failed to demand, in a special and solemn address, the union of Dalmatia with Croatia. Let Dalmatia be given the possibility of freely expressing its sentiments and it is more than certain that it will affirm, by an almost unanimous vote, her desire to be reunited to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

IV. - Strategical Arguments.

The Southern Slavs had not and will never have any desire for conquest. They are a peaceful people who only desire to live in peace with the whole world.

Their geographical position, exposed as it is to covetous desires and to invasion, has forced them to become a warlike people, but only for the defence of their native soil. It is for this reason that they desire natural and sure frontiers, and they believe that the best and most natural of all frontiers is, without doubt, the sea. Thus they cannot tolerate the installation of any power on the eastern coast of the Adriatic or on the islands which forms an integral part of it. They consider such occupations as stragetic bridgeheads, made in view of new conquests at the expense of their territory. The islands of the eastern coast of the Adriatic may be

regarded as fortresses - but only as defensive fortresses and not as offensive fortresses. These islands, in the hands of a foreign power, would really be fortresses directed against our country. If such a state of things was created, our State would lose all its liberty of action, it would fall, by the very fact, under foreign domination, and would find itself in a perpetual state of insecurity. In the constant danger of being suddenly attached by an enemy army, it could not devote itself to the task of developing public education and economic prosperity, but would be forced to concentrate all its energies on the creation of defenses against the menace of foreign invasion. Its force would be completely paralyzed and its sovereignity illusory.

The assertion, according to which the possession of the eastern coast of the Adriatic, or at least some of the islands, would be necessary for Italy to safeguard her western coast from the danger of a pretended aggression on our part, has no basis on fact. History teaches us that, in this region, the movement of conquest has always gone from the western toward the eastern coast (Roman and Venetian invasions) and never in the contrary direction. Italy was attacked and conquered, by sea, by adversaries coming from the South (the Carthagenians and Arabs) or coming from the West (Spaniards), but never from the East. If the eastern littoral of the Adriatic is better provided with ports and gulfs, the western coast is richer in population and natural resources which are the basis of all military and political force. It is for this reason that the eastern coast has never been able to dominate the western coast, while the latter has, on several occasions, conquered the eastern coast, not with a defensive aim but with the well-determined intention of establishing its domination on the Balkan Peninsula. It was thus

that the Romans acted in ancient times, and, in a more recent epoch, the Venetians; it is still what those desire to realize who today claim for Italy a part of the eastern littoral and invoke the necessity of protecting the Italian coast.

The liberty of the Adriatic Sea will only be assured when opposite a rich and populous Italy a State is found on the eastern side capable of establishing equilibrium. And since the predominance in men and natural riches will always be on the side of Italy, mistress of the fertile and populous valley of the Po, the strategic advantage to our state, resulting from the possession of the coast which naturally belongs to it in the basin of the Adriatic, should be all the more assured to us.

So long as these elements of maritime supremacy remain separate, the liberty of navigation will be guaranteed to all nations. But the day when Italy will add the strategic factor to her economic preponderance, by installing herself on the eastern coast, the Adriatic sea will at once become an Italian lake.

V. - Economic Arguments.

The annexation of Dalmatia by a foreign State would certainly entail for it an economic decadence and would create an incurable wound in the organization of our State. The eastern coast, rocky and poor, does not possess the conditions for an independent economic life. Its natural function is to be the outlet of the rich plains of the valleys of the Danube, the Save, the Bosna and the Morava to the sea, and it is from these countries that it ought to live. Separated from the rest of our country Dalmatia could not lead a normal life, as is demonstrated by the five centuries of her history under the Venetian and Austrian dominations.

The principal agricultural products of the eastern coast of the Adriatic are wine and oil, which were exported to Austria, to Hungary and to Bosnia. Foreign competition, which will have no limits, would cause such a depreciation of these products that the Dalmatians would have no means of procuring bread and other food-stuffs of prime necessity. The best proof of this affirmation lies in the terrible consequences resulting from a clause in the Italo-Austrian treaty of commerce which permitted the free importation of the wines of Italy into Austria-Hungary and which brought about the economic ruin of Dalmatia. Already in the Middle Ages the influence of the close relations between Dalmatia and its hinterland made themselves felt. Serbian commerce, at that epoch, was directed in the greater part toward Dalmatia.

On the contrary, in our State, Dalmatia would sell her produce at advantageous prices and would buy foodstuffs of prime necessity cheaper than elsewhere, the importations and exportations being naturally and justly balanced.

Under foreign domination the ports of Dalmatia could not pretend to become ports of transit for the commerce with the hinterland. On the contrary, if they belonged to our State, they would undergo a great development as ports of exportation for the natural riches of the adjacent Jugoslav countries.

VI. - Conclusion.

All these reasons militate in favor of the incorporation of Dalmatia in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. But the strongest of all, is the firm, decided and resolute will of the Dalmatian people to be reunited with its national State and the right which our nation possesses to its territorial integrity. A solution of the Dalmatian question which would be contrary to the will of the population, would inevitably plant the germs of new conflicts.

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